

Activity #3: Independent Writing Riddles

Section 5: Independent Writing

Cut apart into sections.

Class-Made Books:

The possibilities for class-made books are nearly limitless. Subjects can include the alphabet, children's names, favorite foods, holidays, and class themes. All these activities can also be done in Spanish (el alfabeto, los nombres de los niños, comidas favoritas, días de fiestas, y temas asociados con la clase). Initially, the teacher transcribes children's talk onto the book's pages; as their abilities increase, they should be encouraged to write on their own. Class-made books not only teach children about the process and mechanics of writing and the concept of books, but also empower children as both authors and illustrators of their own experiences. The finished books should be read by the whole class and placed in the Library for children to "read" on their own. (Children love to look back at the books they've made!) Some teachers allow children to "check out" class-made books (and other books) from the Library to take home and share with their families.

Journal Writing:

Once the concept of journal writing is introduced, children are often very eager to record their own thoughts and experiences. Children's journal entries often take the form of drawings that tell simple stories about their lives or things they've seen. Journal writing should occur daily, with a teacher taking dictation at least twice a week, and be done in both languages. The subject can be "open choice" or related to a read aloud, the class theme, etc. Time should be set aside for children to share their journal entries, with the teacher and with each other, if they wish to do so. At the end of the school year, children take their journals home. When considered as a whole, journals not only provide a personal record, but also chart the development of children's ability to express themselves through writing. The teacher can also photocopy journal pages and place them in the child's portfolio.

Pretend Play:

Wherever pretend play happens (most typically in the Pretend and Learn center), there are opportunities for authentic writing in both English and Spanish. For example, if the class theme is transportation, the Pretend and Learn center can be transformed into a garage where children work on imaginary cars. A list of repair items can be written on a notepad, and "customers" can be given a bill when their cars are ready. The teacher can help by taking dictation or offering writing assistance to children who request it. This model can be adapted for imaginary restaurants, hardware stores, etc. By keeping writing materials in every center and modeling and discussing how those materials are used, teachers can create opportunities for children to integrate writing into any and every activity!

Environmental Print: Always Authentic

Environmental print is exactly that: print that appears in our environment, both in the classroom and beyond. It is the print we learn to recognize because the colors, pictures, and shapes surrounding the print become so familiar to us. (We know without reading, for example, that the word in the middle of the red hexagonal road sign is *stop*.) The "H" and "C" on the taps of a sink, the "EXIT" sign over the door, and the billboards you see on the freeway are all examples of environmental print. It's important to expose children to environmental print in both English and Spanish.

By its very nature, environmental print exists to convey meaning, and, more often than not, children are fascinated by it—especially print that is familiar or that they can recognize. Environmental print also gives children a chance to feel like successful "readers" at a very early age. Teachers should take advantage of opportunities to increase children's awareness of environmental print and explain these public examples of written language.

Sign-In Sheet:

When the children arrive at school, they write their names on a large sign-in sheet. (Teacher Angel Nihiser sometimes uses sign-in as a transition activity.) The sign-in sheet, which is prepared in advance, should contain each child's name, with a blank space next to each name large enough for the children's "signatures." Sign-in gives children a simple yet important authentic writing experience